

VU Research Portal

'Immediately I thought we should do the same thing': international inspiration and exchange in feminist action against sexual violence

Roggeband, C.M.

published in

European Journal of Women's Studies
2004

DOI (link to publisher)

[10.1177/1350506804042091](https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506804042091)

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Roggeband, C. M. (2004). 'Immediately I thought we should do the same thing': international inspiration and exchange in feminist action against sexual violence. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 11(2), 159-175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506804042091>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

European Journal of Women's Studies

<http://ejw.sagepub.com/>

'Immediately I Thought We Should Do the Same Thing' : International Inspiration and Exchange in Feminist Action against Sexual Violence

Conny Roggeband

European Journal of Women's Studies 2004 11: 159

DOI: 10.1177/1350506804042091

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://ejw.sagepub.com/content/11/2/159>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

[WISE \(The European Women's Studies Association\)](#)

Additional services and information for *European Journal of Women's Studies* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://ejw.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://ejw.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://ejw.sagepub.com/content/11/2/159.refs.html>

‘Immediately I Thought We Should Do the Same Thing’

International Inspiration and Exchange in Feminist Action against Sexual Violence

Conny Roggeband

FREE UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

ABSTRACT Cross-national traffic of feminist ideas have contributed to a growth of the international women’s movement and has shaped national movements. These processes have only recently become the subject of study and theoretical discussion. The theoretical models that have been developed so far fail to take into account the complex nature of intercultural communication. No attention is paid to problems of interpretation and translation that may occur and how ‘adopters’ use the example of others. Instead, this article proposes an empirically grounded, alternative model of the process, based on the cases of women’s organizations against sexual violence in the Netherlands and Spain. The author’s approach focuses on the processes of communication – the relationship between source and followers and the conditions that facilitate or impede communication – and the conditions that lead to adaptation.

KEY WORDS diffusion ♦ international feminist networks ♦ sexual violence ♦ Spain ♦ the Netherlands ♦ women’s movement

In summer 2002, *European Journal of Women’s Studies* published a special issue titled ‘The Traffic in Feminism’, about the active exchange of ideas, experiences and practices among feminists worldwide. The contributions in that issue not only demonstrate the importance of international exchange for the growth and spread of the women’s movement, but also give some important clues about how these processes work. Do activists in different contexts really do ‘the same thing’ as the title citation suggests? Or does the adoption of foreign examples always bring about a process of ‘rearticulation and recontextualization’ as Davis (2002: 243) argues? And, if this is the case, how does this process work?

This issue is particularly interesting in the light of a recent debate in the

European Journal of Women’s Studies Copyright © 2004 SAGE Publications
(London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), 1350-5068 Vol. 11(2): 159–175;
DOI: 10.1177/1350506804042091

field of social movement studies about cross-national diffusion. Although cross-national spread of ideas and practices is often mentioned in (comparative) studies of the women's movement and other social movements, these processes have only recently become the subject of study and theoretical discussion. Various actors (Giugni, 1995; Soule, 1999; Soule, forthcoming; Tarrow, 1998) have argued that cross-national diffusion is central for the emergence and spread of new social movements and have begun to develop theoretical models to help explain these processes. However, I argue that these models are not adequate to explain the complex nature of intercultural communication. No attention is paid to problems of interpretation and translation that may occur and how 'adopters' use the example of others. Instead, I propose an empirically grounded, alternative model of the process, based on the cases of women's organizations against sexual violence in the Netherlands and Spain, more particularly the branches that organized to combat battering and rape. What makes these cases interesting is that they combine a global vision of sexual violence as a universal problem with local objectives (e.g. legal reforms, police training and prevention activities) and organizing (e.g. shelter and assistance services). This global vision appears to facilitate the international spread of ideas and practices. However, it is unclear how activists deal with the differences – in conditions, opportunities and limitations – between their local context and the context of the activists who inspired them. I try to answer this question by examining the rise and development of the movement against sexual violence in two countries with different cultural, social and political circumstances: the Netherlands and Spain. While the Netherlands can be considered an open and internationally oriented society, with an accessible political system, that fosters social movements, Spain was a closed society until the late 1970s. This was due to Franco's totalitarian regime, which prohibited any critical organization and censored all material that was seen to oppose the values promoted by the regime. This created major obstacles to active international exchange.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES OF EXCHANGE

Diffusion theory focuses on the communication and adoption of innovations. According to Rogers, the leading author in this field, diffusion occurs when some 'innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system' (Rogers, 1995: 5). First, he defines the *object of diffusion* as 'an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption' (Rogers, 1995: 11). The message is clear, straightforward and presents no problems

of interpretation. Second, transmitters and potential adopters are connected through communication *channels*. Mass media are seen as 'the most rapid and efficient means to inform an audience' (Rogers, 1995: 18), but interpersonal contacts 'are more effective in persuading an individual to adopt' (Rogers, 1995: 18). *Time* then determines how the process evolves. Ideally, the diffusion process follows an S-shaped curve where the adoption process is initially slow, then rapidly increases and finally tapers off as fewer and fewer members of the system are left to adopt (Rogers, 1995). This implies a linear and unidirectional process. The last element of Rogers's definition is the *social system*. Diffusion is the product of communication between members of a social system. Rogers asserts that these members share 'common meanings, a mutual subcultural language, and are alike in personal and social characteristics' (Rogers, 1995: 19). The only thing that differs is their role: the sender is the innovator and active promoter of this innovation, whereas the receiver is portrayed as the passive recipient of information, which adopts, or eventually, rejects the innovation. The decision to adopt, or reject, is an instrumental choice, based on relevance, efficiency and rationality. Communication between the members appears not to be hindered by problems of interpretation and translation.

Social movement scholars (Giugni, 1995; McAdam and Rucht, 1993; Soule, 1999; Soule, forthcoming; Tarrow, 1994) have elaborated on this model. McAdam and Rucht (1993) have argued, for instance, that the mass media have become of growing importance in connecting actors from different contexts. McAdam (1995) and Tarrow (1995) have related diffusion to waves of protest. According to McAdam (1995: 5) 'initiator' movements 'signal or otherwise set in motion an identifiable protest cycle'. Spin-off movements 'draw their impetus and inspiration from the original initiator movement'. An important condition for this diffusion is identification or 'attribution of similarity' (McAdam, 1995: 5). These arguments draw our attention to important mechanisms in the diffusion process, such as the role of the media and identification. However, the core of the sender-receiver model and its basic assumptions are left intact.

This classical diffusion model fails to take into account the complexity of intercultural communication. This communication does not occur within a social system, but between members of different systems. International diffusion between social movements entails communication between groups that operate within different political, cultural and social contexts. In these processes perception and translation play a central role. As Davis (2002: 243) demonstrates, translation implies that 'the text is always articulated and in the process, meanings change and a new configuration of the original text emerges'. Likewise, Saguy (2002: 263) argues that 'imported ideas are invariably transformed as they interact

with political and legal traditions'. This implies that the receiver is far from a passive recipient, but rather an active interpreter, translator and modifier. Classic diffusion theory tends to neglect the role of the agency. Diffusion involves learning processes, as followers do not simply copy ideas, but try to make sense of experiences elsewhere before importing them into their context. In light of that, I focus on the interpretation and employment of innovative ideas by followers. Thus, in contrast with the classical model, I would assert that diffusion is not a simple process of receiving and adopting, but rather of *interpreting, translating and adapting*. I emphasize the processes of communication – the relationship between source and followers and the conditions that facilitate or impede communication – and adaptation (i.e. how the followers translate and modify the example). The process of importing a new idea or model in another context requires what I call a *strategic framing effort*. This concept is taken from Snow and Benford (Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow and Benford, 1992) who draw attention to the role of framing in social movements. Social movement actors are viewed as agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning. They construct, adapt and negotiate frames (or interpretation structures) that enable them to locate, perceive, interpret, identify and label events or occurrences. What results from this activity are 'collective action frames'. These consist of: (1) 'a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change and attributions about who or what is to blame' (diagnosis); (2) 'an articulation of a proposed solution to the problem' (prognosis); and (3) 'a rationale for engaging others in collective action' (Benford and Snow, 2000: 615–17). Social movement organizations use these frames in a certain context to persuade both adherents and adversaries. The traffic and adoption of collective action frames, ideas and practices therefore also require framing processes. Potential adopters have to fit these frames into a different context and make it congruent with their own frames of reference. The spread of shelters for battered women and rape crisis centres to different contexts (the Netherlands and Spain) demonstrates how activists use original frames and rearticulate these to fit them into their own contexts.

DATA AND METHOD

I used several resources to reconstruct the historic processes involved in the emergence and development of different organizations in the Netherlands and Spain. To trace the sources, channels and mechanisms of diffusion, and to study the considerations and decisions of the actors involved, I analysed written materials from the women's movement. This ranged from leaflets and papers to minutes of meetings and

correspondence. My frame of analysis was based on Axelrod (1976) and van de Graaf and Hoppe (1992), who designed a method to reconstruct the structures and lines of argumentation in discourse. To complement this material, I conducted nearly 60 oral history interviews with initiators and leaders of groups established to combat battering and rape between 1973 (the year the first Dutch group emerged) and 1999, when I brought my fieldwork to a close. During the interviews, I asked the respondents about their initial inspiration and international contacts, and their perception, use and adaptation of foreign examples. I was also able to participate in some actions and meetings of the Spanish movement which mobilized in the end of the 1990s on the issues of domestic abuse and femicide. This helped me to observe in practice how some foreign examples were used by Spanish feminists. Aside from these primary resources, I examined secondary sources, including newspaper data and other media references, to find out what was reported about foreign examples, how these frames resonated within the national context, and if and how national organizations made reference to their foreign sources.

These sources made it possible to carefully reconstruct the cross-national spread of ideas. In piecing the picture together, I examined certain questions. How, for instance, did feminists in the Netherlands and Spain come across the examples elsewhere? How did they perceive them? And what made them decide to use, modify, or reject certain ideas and practices? I analyse these processes in two stages. I begin by reconstructing how feminists in both contexts came across the ideas developed by their counterparts in other countries. I then go on to examine carefully the processes of perception, translation and adaptation and the framing efforts involved.

INITIAL INSPIRATION FROM ABROAD

In the late 1960s, the issue of sexual violence emerged within feminist consciousness-raising groups. This soon became a central theme of the women's movement. In the early 1970s, the first rape crisis centres were opened in the USA. These centres became national networking hubs for the growing movement, which also spread to Europe (see Matthews, 1994: 9–10). The theme of battering first emerged somewhat accidentally in the UK. During a campaign to protest against the cessation of free school milk, a group of women shared their experiences of violence, giving birth to the inspiration for a social movement (Dobash and Dobash, 1992: 26). In 1971, the group established Chiswick Women's Aid, a shelter for battered women that swiftly became a paradigmatic example for other European, American and Canadian feminists (see Dobash and Dobash, 1992: 12). From these first pioneers a broad movement against sexual

violence emerged around issues ranging from sexism and pornography to violence in the workplace and in the family.

The spread of these new ideas and practices occurred in different stages. It began with the innovative pioneers who presented a new model and paradigmatic frame in the early 1970s. Within a few years' time, the so-called 'early risers' took over the pioneers' model. By the 1980s, the 'later followers' used the examples of both pioneers and early risers. This interaction gave rise to international networks that actively exchanged their experiences and ideas.

The Early Risers

The Dutch women's movement was one of the first to follow the examples of the American and British pioneers. In the Netherlands, a group of feminist social workers organized in 1973 to create a special assistance programme for women who had experienced sexual violence. Initially, they planned to set up a rape crisis centre, but ended up establishing a shelter:

Our original plan was to provide assistance to women, who had been raped, following the principles of the American rape crisis centers. But after visiting London [Chiswick Women's Aid], we decided to work with battered women. We have seen how the shelter can be run with minimal bureaucracy; yet make a maximal political impact. And we were very impressed by seeing how women are mobilized to handle their own situation. (Report of visit to Chiswick Women's Aid, 1974, IIAV [Internationaal Informatiecentrum en Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging/International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement], Amsterdam)

In October 1974, six months after their first visit to Chiswick, the Dutch group opened the first shelter on the European continent. This shelter was run without state assistance.

The history of the first rape crisis centre in the Netherlands, which was set up a few years later, in November 1975, was very similar. In 1975, a group of feminists, including some involved in the shelter service, planned a visit to the USA, since that was seen as 'the only country where raped women are taken seriously' (quote a subsidy application letter to the National Committee for the International Women's Year, 11 June 1975). To locate and contact groups in New York, Washington and Philadelphia, they consulted *Rape: The First Sourcebook for Women* edited by the New York Radical Feminists (report of the group's visit to the USA in September 1975). The National Committee for the International Women's Year granted them a small subsidy. The visit proved a success: 'when we return we shall know exactly what to do and will start organizing' (JAC [Jongeren Advies Centrum/Youth Advice Centre], 1975: 73). Within two months, the group opened the first rape crisis centre on the European

continent, under a name borrowed from their American counterparts: Women against Rape (Vrouwen Tegen Verkrachting [VTV]).

These early risers obtained their information through direct channels. In both cases, they established personal contact with the pioneers. Their on-site visits to study how the services functioned in practice, to see how the women were actually helped and to meet with the leaders of these initiatives all contributed to their positive evaluations of the model:

It was so impressive, especially Pizzey [initiator of Chiswick Women's Aid]. Immediately I thought we should do the same thing. You could see it was such a good concept. The women managed everything themselves, which showed us we didn't have to do everything ourselves. (Martine van Rappard, co-founder first Dutch shelter)

The Dutch followers of Chiswick emphasized the symbolic value of the shelter: 'Chiswick was a "running sore", it made visible, undeniable, the problem of violence. That was what made the concept so powerful' (Anita Aerts, co-founder Dutch shelter). The adopters of the rape crisis model underlined its 'radical political strategy' (VTV, report of visit to the USA in September 1975). In both cases, the followers perceived the examples as an important innovation breaking with the traditional 'patriarchal' service paradigm and challenging the social order.

Later Followers

The organizers of Spanish initiatives against sexual violence can be characterized as late followers. Their belated emergence is mainly due to the transition from an authoritarian regime towards a democratic structure. An important impetus for the Spanish movement against sexual violence was the International Tribunal of Crimes against Women, celebrated in 1976 in Brussels. During this meeting women from many parts of the world exchanged experiences of their struggles to end violence against women. This was the first important international conference after the death of dictator Franco and the Spanish participants returned 'inspired and euphoric, full of energy and power' (Escario et al., 1996: 286). Various groups began to study foreign examples, mainly by reading the literature. An exception to this was the Barcelona-based Grup Alba, which visited several shelters in the UK in 1981. However, the absence of facilitating conditions, such as a civil society and government aid, made it difficult to establish services in Spain. This changed in 1983, when the new leftist government opened a national equality office, the Women's Institute (WI), and designated a substantial budget to subsidize women's initiatives. The WI took an active role in supporting more direct international contacts. In 1984, the WI invited workers from shelters in Amsterdam, Berlin and Copenhagen to talk about their experiences. In that same

year, a feminist organization affiliated with the ruling party founded the first shelter in Madrid. Grup Alba received funding to visit shelters in France, Denmark and the UK, and opened a shelter in Barcelona in 1985.

The first rape crisis centres had been opened in 1984 in Barcelona and Madrid. However, feminists had started to mobilize on the issue of rape far earlier,¹ informed by feminist action elsewhere. Since they lacked the resources to visit foreign examples, the organization of the rape crisis centres was based on foreign literature:

We knew of similar groups in different European countries, but we did not have the means to travel. That was really a pity because I think international exchange and cooperation would have helped us a lot. (Tina Alarcon, co-founder of Asistencia a Mujeres Violadas, Madrid)

Interestingly enough, we can also find examples of late followers in the Netherlands. In 1982, a group in Amsterdam founded a 24-hour hotline (Tegen Haar Wil [Against Her Will]) modelled on the American crisis hotlines developed in the early 1970s.

There was no immediate help available for victims of rape. We liked the American idea of a 24-hour service, that you could call whenever you needed it. (Rozemarijn Esselink, co-founder of Tegen Haar Wil)

In laying the groundwork for this service, the group consulted 'a volume of American literature', which explained how hotlines function and provided practical information (see Mellink et al., 1992: 8). The project's name incidentally refers to the title of Susan Brownmiller's (1975) book, *Against Our Will*.

In contrast with the early risers, whose initiatives were based on just one example, later followers had a far wider range of examples available. This stimulated the groups to compare and think what example would best fit their context.

It is striking to see the differences [between shelter services in various countries]. For instance, in Denmark the shelter is run basically with volunteers, whereas the shelter in Marseilles has an interdisciplinary team of professionals working with the women and their children. (Grup Alba, report of visit to France, Denmark and the UK, 1985, archive of Odila Pérez, co-founder of Grup Alba)

Founders of the Madrid shelter service argued that the original example of Chiswick was not very applicable in the Spanish context:

The initiative taken almost a decade ago in England to create, maintain and manage shelter services, shows important differences with the model that can be applied in Spain. This is due to the specific characteristics of our country and the socioeconomic conditions of Spanish women. . . . To use the

model of shelters in Spain, we need to adapt it in three areas 1) subsidies and economic resources, 2) characteristics of personnel and services, and 3) management of the houses. (Elu and García Pérez, 1984)

Also, the late followers felt more freedom to creatively adapt the examples. For instance, the Dutch group, which drew on the models of hotlines, also turned to models from other movements:

The organization of our 24-hour hotline was inspired by the movement against nuclear energy. They work with small cells and we used that principle in establishing Tegen Haar Wil. (Martijn van der Kroef, coordinator of Tegen Haar Wil)

So, in general, late followers were more reluctant to simply translate foreign examples.

Seeking International Sisterhood

In all of the cases studied, the initiative to study and visit a foreign group or practice was taken by the 'followers'. Thus, contrary to the classical models of diffusion there was no sender actively promoting the spread of its ideas. Instead, the 'followers' actively sought information about useful foreign examples.

An important impetus behind this process of seeking and exchange was the internationalist ideal of feminism. Feminist activists viewed international solidarity as an important means to create a strong political force. This ideal is well voiced by Diane Russell, one of the organizers of the International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women:

SISTERHOOD IS POWERFUL! INTERNATIONAL SISTERHOOD IS MORE POWERFUL! This slogan captures well one of the assumptions of those who organized the International Tribunal. Our struggle must not only be conducted within nations but cross national boundaries. (Russell and van de Ven, 1984)

As a result feminists were actively engaged in international networking:

We were well informed about the current debates. We received newsletters, magazines and documentation from all over the world. The international dimension was very central in those days. And it was quite easy. If you wanted to go to London, for instance, you just phoned the Women's Centre and you could come over. In turn, we received anyone who contacted us as well. (Anita Aerts, co-founder of the first Dutch shelter)

These international networks are central to the process of diffusion. In part, networks are also the product of diffusion. The network starts with early risers, which translate the ideas and practices of a pioneer, and

further expands when national and international actors start using these examples.

ADOPTING MODELS FROM ELSEWHERE: CONTINUITIES AND ADAPTATIONS

Followers imported ideas to their own context. How did they translate and modify the original frames? There was a strong consensus about the definition of the problem and its causes (diagnosis), however more adaptations were made in the proposed solutions (prognosis).

Diagnosis

Although the Dutch and Spanish organizations in this study emerged at different times and did not always model themselves after the same examples, there is a striking continuity in the initial problem definitions used by the pioneers and their different followers. This can be explained by the universal assumptions of these definitions. Almost invariably, activists from different branches argued that violence is a universal phenomenon rooted in patriarchal structures:

In all patriarchal societies women have a subordinated position. These societies are shaped by sexual hierarchy and violence from one sex against the other. Violence is an expression of this situation of discrimination of women and the power of men. From this structural perspective, violence is happening in all social classes, in all economic ranks, in all cultural and ideological sectors. (Conclusions, unpublished proceedings of the Conference on Women and Violence, Madrid, 1984)

This comprehensive explanation was an important facilitating factor in the spread of this diagnosis. Activists from different contexts perceived their problems as similar:

It seems to us that the problem of battering that our sisters in England, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands are fighting against has similar conditions and characteristics in our country. (*Jornadas Mujer y Servicios Sociales* [First Conference on Women and Social Services], Conclusions, 1984: 150)

[The meeting in] Brussels showed how much support women can give to each other and how similar their problems are. (Dutch activist, quoted in Russell and van de Ven, 1984: 276)

This perception of similarity was an important mechanism to identify with women elsewhere and adopt their problem definitions.

Prognosis

Far less consensus existed about the prognoses or solutions to the problems of battering and rape. While the very early followers of the British and American pioneers aimed at an almost direct translation of the models studied, later followers were more critical of these examples and applied them differently.

The early followers of the battered women's movement and the anti-rape movement adopted the models of the shelters and rape crisis centres with only minor adaptations. The proposed solutions to battering and rape were seen as highly adequate. The founders of the first Dutch shelter underlined that the shelter strategy had a political aim that went far beyond crisis intervention:

Offering refuge to battered women was a political act. It was political to open a shelter and demonstrate that battering was a problem, an extensive problem not limited to specific social classes. Because that was the general belief: if it exists it is only a problem in certain marginalized groups. (Anita Aerts, co-founder of the Dutch shelter movement)

Dutch feminists embraced the basic principles of the shelter service: self-help, very popular within the Anglo-Saxon culture, and a volunteering and collectivist structure that both fitted well in the Dutch social movement culture. They saw these principles as a means to contest traditional service models, which they considered 'patriarchal' because of their hierarchical, formal structure. Instead, the shelter model created equality between workers and residents and 'encouraged women to become involved in the running of the household and to make their own personal decisions' (Blijf van m'n lijf, annual report, 1974–5: 5). The Chiswick principles also facilitated adoption, since these lowered the costs of the initiative and made it possible to organize without external resources.

Spanish feminists, for their part, reframed the basic principles of volunteering and horizontal organizing. To a certain extent, adaptations were necessary to fulfil various requirements for state funding. These requirements called for more formal organizational structures and a professional staff. Although Spanish feminists saw this as an important obstacle to implementing the self-help model of the original shelters, they had no alternative funding, and were also quite eager to make the state responsible for fighting sexual violence. Thus, the founders of the Spanish shelters had to adapt the original frame and did this by arguing that volunteering is not compatible with the feminist principle of economic independence of women. To safeguard the principles of self-help and equality between workers and residents, while working with a professional staff, it was argued that these professionals had to be feminists:

It is important that the shelters be based on feminist principles. . . . We think, therefore, that the shelters should be managed and controlled by feminists, should be non-hierarchical and that those affected should be the ones who run the house and make the daily decisions. (*Jornadas Mujer y Servicios Sociales*, 1984: 57)

The Dutch late follower Tegen Haar Wil adapted the original frame to the changing political context. While the early anti-rape movement defined itself as anti-state and autonomous (see Matthews, 1994: xii),² this later group decided to make use of favourable political opportunities and applied for state funding. Also, the group accepted the invitation of the local authorities to become a member of an advisory committee on sexual violence. There were disagreements about these issues, as some activists feared cooptation. Finally, this conflict was settled by establishing a section dedicated to radical action, to stress the group's role as critical outsider (minutes of meeting, November 1984, IIAV, Amsterdam).

Political opportunities and available resources were an important reason to adapt the original prognostic frames. Other adaptations were inspired by critique of the original frame or its producers. For instance, the Spanish anti-rape organization Comisión Anti Agresiones (CAA) first adopted American slogans, but later started to criticize some of the ideas of their American counterparts:

First the [American] slogans reached us, slogans we adopted without much reflection, because they were transcendent slogans, like 'No rape without answer'; 'All men are potential rapists'; 'When a woman says no, she means no'. . . . Well, this sort of slogan, and then later came the reflection about what is behind these slogans. We started to read and discuss, and that is when we started to expurgate the slogans. (Cristina Garaizabal, CAA Madrid)

The group wanted to avoid some of 'the puritan tendencies' in the American discussion that defined (hetero)sexuality as the problem.³ Instead, they argued that Spain needed a sexual liberation to finish with its conservative, puritan past: 'We should not leave sexuality for more secure times, but search for our pleasure now and meanwhile fight against the concrete forms of sexual violence' (*Jornadas Anti Agresiones*, Santiago de Compostela, 1988, archivo CAA Madrid). So, the CAA produced an alternative frame that in their view was more adequate for the Spanish context.

Learning experiences also led to adaptations. Lessons from elsewhere helped to refine local strategies and helped feminists avoid pitfalls encountered elsewhere. The struggle against pornography is a case in point. Inspired by US feminism, pornography became a central issue in the Dutch women's movement in the late 1970s. Pornography was depicted as the root of violence against women. American anti-pornography feminists

introduced an innovative tactic to use the legal system for women's protection, assigning pornography to the realm of sex discrimination. Although Dutch legislation lacked any provisions for penalizing gender discrimination, the strategy was adopted by a Dutch group called Women against Pornography (*Vrouwen Tegen Porno*). In 1981, the group successfully requested the rightist government to withdraw a bill to liberalize pornography regulations. This outraged liberal and leftist political parties, who accused the women's movement of joining ranks with the enemy. A few years later, when these parties presented a new bill for more liberal pornography laws, they encountered no feminist opposition. This change of strategy can only be understood as lesson-drawing from controversies about the same issue that had arisen in the meantime in the USA. Feminists there aligned with conservative forces to pass an ordinance that allowed any women to file a civil suit against makers or distributors of pornography. This caused major conflicts and schisms within the American women's movement, ending in divisions and demobilization. Dutch feminists feared that a coalition with rightist parties aimed at censoring or prohibiting pornography would have a similar effect in the Netherlands:

In the US, the coalition between radical feminists and the right (Moral Majority) resulted in an ordinance to penalize pornography in the city of Indianapolis. It looks as though the same is going to happen in Minneapolis. The article 'Sisterhood is Powerful' shows the dangers of this collaboration with a powerful anti-feminist movement. If the Christian right gets the opportunity to eliminate the women's movement, it certainly will. (Nonja, *Vrouwenweekblad*, 5 October 1984)

Thus, strategies and organizational models travelled in various contexts and were used by local feminists to shape their own practices. Some ideas were taken almost literally; more often, however, concepts and models were modified by followers. I found that the diagnosis or problem definition is less subject to adaptations than the prognosis or proposed solution. This may be explained by the universal character of the problem-definition which, in principle, requires no local adaptation. Whereas, in looking for solutions to the problem, feminists had to engage their context. The demands of the environment, the available resources and the cultural climate had to be dealt with. The cases of the Spanish and Dutch women's movements against sexual violence make clear that, while the actors identified with the spirit and objectives of the movements they looked to as their examples, they also needed local appropriation. What motivated these transformations can be ascribed to different factors: practical or political factors, the critical evaluations of practices developed, or learning experiences. Interestingly, I found that these modifications were often strategically framed in accordance with the original frame. Followers emphasized that their adaptations did not threaten the

basic principles of the original model. As it appears, followers still found it important to accentuate 'sameness' or continuity between sources and followers.

CONCLUSIONS

The anti-rape and battered women's movements in the Netherlands and Spain used foreign examples to shape their own ideas and practices. The processes of diffusion were different for organizations that followed the example of pioneers at an early stage and for the later groups. Whereas the early followers were informed by a single example, the later followers had a range of examples available. Early groups established personal contact with the pioneer, which stimulated identification and persuaded them to translate the example to their own context. Later followers, in contrast, were stimulated to compare between different translations, including the pioneer, which created more distance and freedom to search for their own alternative.

Both early and later followers actively sought information about foreign examples to facilitate their own organization. They were driven by the ideal of internationalism and aimed at creating solidarity across borders, which resulted in cross-national networking and exchange. Pioneers, early risers and late followers perceived that the problems of battering and rape were similar in each context and that these were rooted in the transcending patriarchal structure. This perceived similarity, however, did not result in a similar strategy. The case studies demonstrate how activists incorporated the ideas and practices of their examples, in interaction with the traditions and settings of their particular context. They adapted the solutions proposed for practical or political reasons, as a result of critical evaluations of foreign examples that did not fit well into the cultural context, or due to learning experiences. The process of importing a new idea or model into another context required a *strategic framing effort*. Activists framed their adaptation in line with the original frame, so as to stress the continuity or similarity within the international movement.

My empirical evidence makes clear that the classic sender-receiver model of diffusion is not adequate to understand the cross-national exchange of ideas and practices between social movements. First, contrary to the assumption of classic diffusion models that focus on the source or 'sender' as the key player, actively exporting ideas, perspectives and potential solutions, I have found the follower to be the principal actor in the process, not only by initiating the contact and studying the example, but also by interpreting, translating and adapting ideas and practices. Second, diffusion theory fails to conceptualize the context of diffusion as

a decisive factor for both the process and its content. Most diffusion theories presuppose that the process occurs either in a universal context or a contextual vacuum. However, cross-national diffusion between social movements implies that actors operate in diverging contexts, with different cultural frames and divergent opportunities or obstacles. These contextual differences affect the communication process – how actors perceive and interpret the ideas and practices of their counterparts elsewhere – and will also motivate them to adapt the examples.

Diffusion is crucial to understanding the rise of both the Dutch and Spanish movements against sexual violence. Inspiration from abroad prompted and stimulated local initiatives. A global vision and international orientation were fundamental preconditions for the travelling of feminist ideas and practices. However, as I have demonstrated, the dynamics of exchange and translation made the women's movement simultaneously local and global. Social movements often engage in international networks and may adopt a common frame. However, despite ongoing processes of globalization and global networking, the national context remains key to the mobilization of social movements. Activists are shaped by their contexts, and, in turn, actively engage in processes of contextualization in their efforts to implement new ideas and practices.

NOTES

1. The first feminist magazine in post-Franco Spain, *Vindicación Feminista*, reported on the first mobilizations in Barcelona in November 1976.
2. This is voiced by the earlier Dutch follower of the anti-rape movement: 'We do not engage in politics. Parties and union have a hierarchical structure and are managed by patriarchal men' (Bleich et al., 1982: 104).
3. This is the position of Catherine MacKinnon: 'sexuality itself can no longer be regarded as unimplicated. Nor can the meaning of practices of sexual violence be categorized away as violence not sex' (MacKinnon, 1997: 158).

REFERENCES

- Axelrod, R. (1976) 'The Analysis of Cognitive Maps', pp. 55–76 in R. Axelrod (ed.) *Structure of Decision: the Cognitive Maps of Political Elite*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Benford, R.D. and D.A. Snow (2000) 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611–39.
- Bleich, A. et al., eds (1982) *Feminisme en politieke macht. Deel 1: Posities, problemen en strategieën*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Populier.
- Brownmiller, S. (1975) *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

- Davis, K. (2002) 'Feminist Body/Politics as World Traveller: Translating *Our Bodies, Ourselves*', *The European Journal of Women's Studies* 9(3): 223–47.
- Dobash, R.E. and R.P. Dobash (1992) *Women, Violence and Social Change*. London: Routledge.
- Elu, A. and M. García Pérez (1984) *Casas de acogida en Inglaterra*. Madrid: Instituto de la Mujer.
- Escario, P., I. Alberdi and A.I. López-Accotto (1996) *Lo personal es político: el movimiento feminista en la transición*, Estudios 45. Madrid: Instituto de la Mujer.
- Giugni, M. (1995) 'Cross-National Diffusion of Protest', pp. 181–206 in H.P. Kriesi, R. Koopmans, J.W. Duyvendak and M.G. Giugni (eds) *The Politics of New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- JAC (Jongeren Advies Centrum Amsterdam) (1975) *Jaarverslag 1975* [Annual Report]. Amsterdam: JAC.
- Jornadas Mujer y Servicios Sociales* [First Conference on Women and Social Services] (1984) Madrid: Instituto de la Mujer.
- McAdam, D. (1995) '“Initiator” and “Spin-Off” Movements: Diffusion Processes in Protest Cycles', paper presented at the conference on 'Cross-National Influences and Social Movement Research', Mont-Pelerin, 15–19 June.
- McAdam, D. and D. Rucht (1993) 'The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528: 56–87.
- MacKinnon, C. (1997) 'Sexuality', in L. Nicholson (ed.) *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Matthews, M. (1994) *Confronting Rape: The Feminist Anti-Rape Movement and the State*. London: Routledge.
- Mellink, R. et al., eds (1992) 'Je zou vergeten hoe het was' [You Might Forget What it Was Like], *Stichting Tegen Haar Wil 1983–1991*. Amsterdam: GG&GD, Steunpunt Seksueel Geweld Amsterdam.
- Rogers, E.M. (1995) *Diffusion of Innovations*, 4th edn. New York: The Free Press.
- Russell, D. and N. van de Ven (1984) *Crimes Against Women: The Proceedings of the International Tribunal*. East Palo Alto, CA: Frog in the Well.
- Saguy, A.C. (2002) 'International Crossways: Traffic in Sexual Harassment Policy', *The European Journal of Women's Studies* 9(3): 249–67.
- Snow, D. and R.D. Benford (1992) 'Master Frames and Cycles of Protest', pp. 133–55 in A.D. Morris and C.M. Mueller (eds) *Frontiers in New Social Movement Theory*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Soule, S. (1999) 'The Diffusion of an Unsuccessful Innovation', *ANNALS, AAPSS* No. 566 (November): 120–31.
- Soule, S. (forthcoming) 'Diffusion Processes Within and Across Movements', in D.A. Snow et al. (eds) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tarrow, S. (1994) *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tarrow, S. (1995) 'The Europeanisation of Conflict: Reflections from a Social Movement Perspective', *West European Politics* No. 2: 223–51.
- Tarrow, S. (1998) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd rev. edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van de Graaf, H. and R. Hoppe (1992) *Beleid en politiek*. Muiderberg: Coutinho.

Conny Roggeband is a senior researcher in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Free University of Amsterdam. She earned a doctorate degree in political science from Nijmegen University. She has published on gender mainstreaming, sexual politics and social movements. Her current research examines identification processes and accommodation strategies of migrants in Europe. Address: Vrije Universiteit, Faculteit der Sociale Wetenschappen, De Boelelaan 1081c, kamer U 528, 1018 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands. [email: cm.roggeband@fsw.vu.nl]

